



## river otter

*Lutra canadensis*

Kingdom: Animalia  
Division/Phylum: Chordata - vertebrates  
Class: Mammalia  
Order: Carnivora  
Family: Mustelidae

### Features

The adult river otter is 36 to 53 inches long, including a 12 to 18-inch tail. It weighs 20 to 25 pounds. The body is covered with short, dark brown fur. The belly is a little lighter than the rest of the body and the throat is white. The sides of the face are tan. Its toes are webbed. The small ears can close when the otter is under water. The otter's tail is thick and decreases in size to the tip.

### Natural History

The river otter lives in large rivers, wetlands, and lakes. It eats aquatic birds and insects, mussels, crayfish, fish, frogs, muskrats, and turtles. It is very playful and will slide down the banks of interior rivers and streams. This animal is active day and night. It is a great diver and swimmer and moves much easier in the water than out of it. Mating occurs in the spring. After mating, the fertilized eggs undergo a period of time in which they do not implant in the uterus or develop much. Therefore, the gestation period is very long, nearly nine months. Young are born in February or March. Litter size varies from one to six.

### Habitats

Mississippi River; Missouri River; interior rivers and streams; constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs; natural lakes and prairie marshes

### Iowa Status

threatened; native

The river otter was trapped to extinction in Iowa. Since reintroduction the population has been growing and expanding.

### Iowa Range

statewide

### Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001.  
*Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats* CD-ROM.